



VIDEO NEWS

DVD FORMAT FIGHT GOES ON

The confusion over whether a compromise can be found between the Blu-ray and HD-DVD formats escalated this month. Ken Kutaragi, the outspoken president of Sony Computer Entertainment, recently declared that negotiations to try to avoid a videotape-like format war had reached "game over" and that there would be no compromise.

Days later, a report on Nikkei Net said that talks might resume after shareholder meetings in late June. Both Sony, which backs Blu-ray, and Toshiba, which champions HD-DVD, are expected to undergo boardroom reshuffles this summer, leading to hopes that new leadership on both sides might reach a compromise. When asked if talks were ongoing a Toshiba spokesperson told *Shopper* that it "will continue to engage in necessary discussion in pursuit of format unification for the utmost benefit of consumers". Sony was unable to provide a statement before we went to press.

To confuse matters further, Microsoft has agreed to work with Toshiba on HD-DVD products, announcing plans to "investigate development of HD-DVD players using Microsoft Windows CE technology". Microsoft chairman Bill Gates told journalists that the company "would take a very hard look at" incorporating a next-generation DVD player into future Xboxes but refused to state a preference for either format. "We have taken a neutral position relative to the format," he said, but added that Microsoft has "benefited from the strong relationship [it has] with Toshiba."

WHAT NO TAPE?

JVC's original Everio camcorder was well received by *Shopper* in our April 2005 issue but didn't sell well, being limited by the size and cost of the 4GB Microdrives it used for storage.

The new model is more conservative in appearance, but uses the same 1.8" hard disk technology as the iPod.

This gives it at least 20GB of storage, which provides room for about seven hours of uninterrupted shooting at DVD quality.

We had a chance to play with the unit recently; the idea of using hard disks for instant random access to footage seems promising. We hope to bring you a full review next month.

TV ON THE GO

Pinnacle has released the PCTV 200e, a portable digital TV tuner with built-in antenna. Combined with a laptop, it can give you digital TV on the move. We will review it next month.



REVIEW MEDIA PLAYER

PINNACLE ShowCenter 200

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £165 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.pinnaclesys.com

Pinnacle's ShowCenter 200 is a media-streaming device that's designed to liberate your files from the confinement of your PC and bring them into the living room. It supersedes the older 1000g model and has integrated wireless, digital rights management (DRM) compatibility and support for high-definition (HD) files.

The device supports all common audio, photo and video formats with no obvious exceptions. First you have to install Pinnacle's media manager software on your PC, which uses Microsoft's Media connect standard. The Pinnacle software then scans your PC and adds any appropriate files to its list.

The ShowCenter is easy to install and comes with a clear and concise manual. We connected it to an 801.11g wireless network simply by selecting it and supplying the security key. It works both with router-based networks and through direct ad hoc connection to a PC. However, it needs a wired connection for HD video files as current wireless standards don't have the necessary bandwidth.

Once networked the ShowCenter found our server PC automatically, and we were able to browse the media files by name using the remote. The menus can be sluggish compared to those of a Freeview box, for example, but they're not slow enough to be aggravating. The ShowCenter is fully equipped with outputs, including a component output, which supports HD, and RGB SCART for connection to a standard TV set.

It does a great job of playing media files and displayed movies over the wireless connection



without any artefacts. It scales photos capably so that you can view them on a standard TV, and you can even plug in a digital camera directly through the front USB port.

We piped audio through the digital output to a surround-sound amp, and the device reproduced both music and movie soundtracks well. It supports Dolby Digital surround sound with compatible movie files, and a pair of standard phono outputs enables you to link to TV and hi-fi simultaneously.

This is a well-designed product and by far the best example of its type we've seen to date. It is perfect for use with a standard living room TV thanks to its impressive picture scaling, and it integrates well with your home network to display your media files where you can enjoy them in comfort. Best of all, it's much quieter and cheaper than purchasing a media centre PC for your living room.

Seth Barton



Good compatibility



Can't stream high-definition video files wirelessly

SPECIFICATIONS 1.5GHz PC required with 256MB RAM and Windows XP with SP1; SCART, component, S-video and composite outputs, two stereo phono outputs, coaxial S/PDIF output, optical S/PDIF output, USB, 100Mbit/s network, wireless 802.11g

HOTLIST DIGITAL TV TUNER

NEBULA ELECTRONICS DigiTV USB

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £99 inc VAT

SUPPLIER Nebula Electronics 01689 897090

DETAILS www.nebula-electronics.com

Most TV cards have a reputation for being difficult to install and use, so it's a relief to find the DigiTV USB. Simple to install, it automatically locates all the digital channels and downloads a seven-day guide. Easy to program and full of clever features, this is the best digital TV tuner on the market.



SPECIFICATIONS RF input, MPEG2 recording, USB Hi-Speed interface. Part code DigiTV USB2

HOTLIST DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA

PANASONIC NV-GS75

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £380 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.rgbdirect.co.uk

DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk

Panasonic's NV-GS75 offers three CCDs at an affordable price. The technology gives the camera excellent picture quality and vivid colours. Only the 10x optical zoom seems a bit stingy compared to other models on the market.

Despite being lightweight and plastic, the NV-GS75 feels well made. The lack of a true 16:9 mode is the only big let-down on an otherwise excellent and affordable DV camera.



SPECIFICATIONS Mini DV camcorder, 3 CCD, 10x optical zoom, USB2 and FireWire interfaces. Part code NVGS75



REVIEW TV TUNER

TWINHAN
Ter D+A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £58 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.pcnextday.co.ukDETAILS www.twinhan.com

TV tuners are one of the most frustrating products available. Often they fail to work when they have just one format to deal with, so we were worried when we saw that Twinhan's Ter D+A PCI card supports both analogue and digital TV.

Fortunately, it works well. The installer program takes care of installing the drivers in just a few minutes. Things tend to go wrong when installing TV software, but Twinhan has avoided problems by sensibly opting to use Cyberlink's PowerCinema. This looks much like Microsoft's Media Center interface, although it's not quite as slick.

Even so, it's much better than most TV tuner software and has an excellent setup wizard that lets you choose between digital and analogue TV. We started with analogue TV, and the device scanned for available channels. This took a while and, although there's a percentage status bar, it doesn't alert you when it's finished. Next, it scans for radio stations and, finally, music stored on your PC.

The TV search takes quite a while, but it's very good. Where the signal is strong enough the software also retrieves the channel name. It doesn't put the channels in order, but you can do this manually. The quality is on a par with that of other analogue products we've tested.

PowerCinema lets you schedule recordings as you would with a video recorder. There's no built-in electronic programming guide (EPG), but it can integrate with third-party services such as TVTV.

At any point you can rerun the setup wizard and select digital TV instead. The channel scan takes

roughly the same amount of time for digital as it does for analogue TV. However, it retrieves all TV station names and furnishes the EPG with the free seven-day guide. Picture quality is significantly better and setting PowerCinema to record programmes is much easier.

You can time-shift both analogue and digital TV using the pause button on the remote. However, there were some annoying jitters on our screen when we resumed playback. The remote control is a little complex, lacking Media Center's simplicity.

The real question about this card is why would you want digital and analogue TV in one package? The answer, for most people, is that you wouldn't. However, it's not much more expensive than a digital-only card. If you live in an area that has poor digital reception, this card is a good way to prepare for when the quality improves. For everyone else, the inclusion of PowerCinema makes it one of the easiest TV cards to use.

David Ludlow

✓ Easy to install; good software bundle

✗ You probably don't need digital and analogue tuners

SPECIFICATIONS Analogue and DVB tuners, composite and S-video inputs, FM radio, CyberLink PowerCinema. **Part code** 1513-2015

HOTLIST DIGITAL VIDEO CAMERA

CANON
MVX10i

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £549 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.askdirect.co.ukDETAILS www.canon.co.uk

Canon's Digid processing system gives this DV camera excellent image quality. There's little digital noise, and an effective image stabiliser removes all but the worst wobbles. The MVX10i is well made and easy to handle, with an easy-to-use menu. A maximum 1,632x1,224 still image resolution and a superb TFT screen complete the package; the only thing missing is a manual focus ring.



SPECIFICATIONS Mini DV cassette, 10x optical zoom, USB and FireWire interfaces. **Part code** 9049A007AA

HOTLIST DVD AUTHORIZING SOFTWARE

ULEAD
DVD MovieFactory 4

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £25 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.ulead.co.uk

DVD MovieFactory is still the best choice for anyone who wants to perform DVD authoring on the cheap. Its menu design is comprehensive and easy to use, and its set-top recorder compatibility, direct tape-to-disc burning and editing of pre-recorded discs are all welcome for this very reasonable price.



REQUIREMENTS Windows 98 or later, Pentium III 800MHz processor, 128MB RAM (512MB recommended), 950MB disk space plus 5GB for video

HOW TO...
Stream
Media

Having to sit in your computer room to enjoy the digital media files stored on your PC is a pain. Music should be played on a stereo, while video and photographs are best viewed on a TV.

Streaming media devices allow you to store files on your PC but use them anywhere in your house over a network. A 802.11g wireless network (see page 157) has enough bandwidth for music, photos and video with a bit rate of less than 5Mbit/s (such as DivX) but high-definition (HD) video requires a wired network.

You'll need a streaming box in each room in which you want to receive the media. These come in two varieties: audio only and full multimedia. Audio devices are generally smaller and often look like digital radios. They have standard stereo outputs to connect to your hi-fi and a display to select and play music.

Multimedia devices, such as Pinnacle's ShowCentre 200 (opposite) look more like DVD players and have all the sockets you need to connect them to a TV (SCART, S-video and, occasionally, component) and a hi-fi. They can stream video and image files as well as music.

The final piece of the puzzle is a streaming media server on your PC. This software provides the files you request and lets you choose the content you want to share. It also lets you organise your files and set up music playlists. Originally, each streaming box had its own server software, but things have improved with Universal Plug and Play (UPnP). Servers using this standard (which should come with your product) work with any UPnP streaming box, so you're not tied to one manufacturer's products.

UPnP servers can discover the capabilities of a streaming media device and offer only suitable files. For example, when an audio-only device connects, the server hides the video and image files. Some UPnP servers also support inter-format transcoding: if a device can't play WMA files, for example, the server can convert the file to an alternative format on the fly.

You can expect to see Microsoft's new Windows Media Connect server software used widely. It's UPnP-based but has some Microsoft-specific features, such as Digital Rights Management (DRM).



▲ Audio streaming boxes have their own displays